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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000496

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SUBJECT: BHUTANESE AMBASSADOR: SECURITY SITUATION IN NEPAL  
WILL HINDER REFUGEE REPATRIATION

REF: STATE 9663

Classified By: Ambassador David C. Mulford, Reason 1.5 (B,D)

1. (C) Summary: The poor security situation in Nepal, instability of the government in Kathmandu, and uncertainty over future GON willingness to deliver on any inherited agreements will hinder the refugee repatriation process, Bhutanese Ambassador Lyonpo Dago Tshering told the Ambassador on January 19. During the meeting, the Ambassador passed PRM A/S Dewey's letter to King Wangchuck (reftel) to Tshering and reiterated USG interest in helping to restart

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the refugee repatriation process. Tshering related that his government had heard rumors of an upcoming military offensive by Nepalese forces against the Maoists. The draft constitution is now being reviewed by the Cabinet and the King plans to "take the document to the people" in February. End Summary.

Security and Stability  
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2. (C) Ambassador Tshering reiterated that the RGOB is not willing to restart the work of the Joint Verification Teams (JVT) under the current security situation in Nepal. He added that if another attack on refugee verification workers occurred similar to the December 22, 2003 incident, there would be "enormous problems back home." He also expressed reservations about the current political developments in Nepal, questioning whether advancing the repatriation process at this time would not cause additional problems. "We want to be part of the solution, but not part of the Nepalese problem," he said, implying that resettling the Category 1 refugees at this time might be destabilizing in Nepal. He had little confidence in the current Nepalese government's ability to remain in power, and noted that the other six opposition factions have already stated they would not abide by agreements made by the Deuba administration.

Letter Diplomacy  
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3. (C) The Ambassador then delivered A/S Dewey's letter (reftel) stressing USG interest in creating momentum in the repatriation process. The Ambassador highlighted the message that spelling out King Wangchuck's plan clearly to the GON could only be positive, and that a unilateral initiative to repatriate Category 1 refugees immediately could break the ice and get the process moving. Ambassador Tshering pledged RGOB support to the repatriation process, adding that Thimphu is open to such a repatriation, but that a dialogue with the GON needs to begin and that Kathmandu should draft the next letter.

4. (C) Tshering described how he had engaged with his Nepalese counterpart shortly after the Dewey/Wangchuck plan was announced in October, but the Nepalese Ambassador told him he did not have a mandate to discuss the issue. In response to the Ambassador's question as to whether there had been any subsequent contact, and Tshering answered that the only engagement between the two governments was the initial exchange of letters. He complained that the letter from the GON focused solely on restarting the JVT process and not on the repatriation of Category 1 refugees.

Maoists  
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5. (C) Tshering postulated that if the security situation in Nepal improved, the JVT process would quickly be back on track. However, when questioned whether that was likely, he quickly said no, adding that he had heard rumors of an upcoming military offensive by the GON against the Maoists and asked if the USG had heard anything about it. (Comment: Embassy has no information about such military action. End Comment)

Constitution  
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6. (SBU) Tshering concluded the meeting by announcing that the draft constitution is ready and is currently being reviewed by the Cabinet. The King plans to take the document to Bhutan's 20 districts for the people's review in February.

No date has been set for its official release or adoption, and it will need a second review by the Cabinet following the King's "road show" and then a vote in the National Assembly. Tshering said that the constitution will not change current

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citizenship laws.  
MULFORD